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## LYOF N. TOLSTOY.

BY W. D. HOWELLS.

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AT eighty a man has so well-nigh finished his work that it may be considered as something definite. He then "has lived," as the Romans preferred to phrase the great final fact, and if he continues to exist, it is because his work lives for him in such praise and blame as the nearer future may then give it as fitly as the further future. In such commemoration of Lyof N. Tolstoy's eightieth birthday as any friend of his may offer, this study of the reasons of his fame may not be the least tribute of affection and gratitude.

The century in which Tolstoy mostly lived and mostly wrought had among its many great names few more memorable than his, if it had any. There was Napoleon and there was Lincoln, and then there was Tolstoy in an order which time may change, though it appears to me certain that time will not change the number of these supreme names.

Since I have set them down here they have suggested to me a sort of representative unity in their relation to one another. If you fancy Napoleon the incarnation of the selfish force which inspired and supported his own triumphant enemies in their reaction against progress; if you suppose Lincoln the type of humanity struggling toward the ideal in the regeneration of the world's polity, you may well conceive of Tolstoy as the soul's criticism of the evil and the good which, however wholly or partially they knew it, the others imperfectly did. The work of Lincoln was no more final than the work of Napoleon; and like Napoleon's and like Lincoln's, Tolstoy's work has been without finality. So far as I can perceive, it has even been without effect in a civilization which calls itself Christian, but which has apparently been no more moved by the human soul as it was

in Tolstoy than by the divine spirit as it was in Christ. At first, indeed, the world was startled by the spectacle of a man of the highest rank, of a most ancient lineage, of great wealth, of renown in arms and in letters, putting from him fame and ease and honor, and proposing literally to obey the word of God, by making himself as one of the least of the brethren of Christ. It was a very curious sight, a bit droll, rather mad, wholly extraordinary. The world could hardly believe its eyes. It rubbed the sleep of two thousand years out of them at the sound of this voice crying in the wilderness, this voice that had so charmed it in fable, and bidding it prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight. Some tears came into its eyes, and some smiles; but after a while its lids fell again, and all was as before. The event, one of the greatest in the history of mankind, has been without perceptible effect in civilization.

On this side the teaching and the living of Tolstoy have been a failure so utter, so abject, that the heart sickens in considering it. An enemy might say that it could come to nothing better, for it was altogether lacking in originality; it was merely the living and the teaching of Christ over again, or if it had initiative in anything it was in the eschewment of some eases and pleasures in life which Christ permitted himself, or others, as harmless. An enemy might reason that this new ascetic was as illogical in the terms upon which he proposed regeneration as he was in the means he employed; and, in fact, the position of Tolstoy was full of illogicality. He proposed to himself poverty, but poverty without the fear of want is the least of hardships; he would give himself to work with his hands, but that was, so far as it went, taking the bread out of the mouths of those who needed the pay for the work of their hands; he dedicated himself to the good of others, as if it could be well to bestow the happiness which he refused; he would deny himself a soft bed and a luxurious board, but how many in all ages had fared simply and lain hard! He was defended from the consequences of his precept and his practice by the inalienable wealth of his family, the inalienable affection of the sovereign for the name and memory of his race. He was safe amidst his renunciations, and his protestations; he could freely do and say things for which the really poor and humble must suffer hunger and prison and exile. It was undeniably grotesque, but it was also pathetic, almost the most

pathetic predicament in history for a noble and sincere and unselfish man. Yet it excited mainly derision, though the actor in the involuntary drama again and again disclaimed and deplored it, and humbly besought those who witnessed it at close range not to regard it as his ideal. Once, to an interviewer, out of those scores and hundreds of interviewers who have swarmed upon him and reported his willing or unwilling words, he turned with the entreaty that he should not be taken as supposing that his life was conformable to his doctrine. It was what he could make it, the best he could make it, on the conditions he had accepted. He has said that he sometimes regretted not having really impoverished himself, though to do it he must have compelled the assent of those whom he had not the heart or perhaps the right to compel. He asked to be regarded as a man staggering through the dark, and often stumbling and falling down, but struggling up and staggering on again.

In this he showed a humility more genuine and precious than all that his simplification, his vowed and voluntary poverty, had graced him with. But the prophet who owns to human weakness, to human frailty of will and action, while he preaches fortitude and renunciation, will hardly have a following. There is no sect of Tolstoyans, there are no disciples or apostles. A few just people in England have gathered in a small community for the practice and the publication of his teaching, his interpretation and application of the doctrine of Christ. But I know of no other embodied acceptance of Tolstoy in an age when Mormonism holds its own, and Eddyism spreads among millions of comfortable people, cheerful in the least and lowest of the least spiritual precepts of the gospel, and more eager to save their bodies than their souls alive. There may be, indeed, a tacit and occult effect from the Tolstoyan morality for which it is yet too early to look, but which may hereafter show itself in a renewed and revitalized Christianity. That end is all that he could hope or wish; and there must have come to him from many hearts a response, oftenest despairing and self-accusing, where his words have awakened a conscience which—

“Not poppy or madragora  
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world  
Can ever medicine to that sweet sleep”

which they “owed yesterday.” This conscience is the sense of

fealty to the eternal and universal human brotherhood, in which there is no high, no low, no better, no worse, no worthy, no unworthy, but only the bond of duty and the tie of love; and in whomsoever Tolstoy's words have awakened it, there is awakened the wish to do plainly and simply the plain and simple will of Christ.

In the hours of disappointment and impatience which he must have passed through, such a result, if he had been aware of it, must have been his sufficient consolation. Being supported in his self-sacrifice and his mission of self-sacrifice by no fanatical frenzy, by no pretence to divine authority which the gospel of Christ does not confer upon all, he doubtless needed this consolation. It has been stupendous, but not wonderful, how his precept and his practice have been misconstrued. Some such misconstruction is the lot of all the prophets whether they convince or confound their time. The greatest of them, Christ Himself, was misconstrued, first in His defeat and then in His triumph. The earliest Christians, who endeavored only for a life of love, peace and purity, were reputed guilty of every wickedness and filthiness. The world has got so far beyond this shabby state of suspicion and accusal, that nothing wrong could be believed of the life of this latest of the earliest Christians, but of his faith all things were misimagined. If any one, with the cloudy impression which most people have of this, will go to Tolstoy's books, he will be hardly less than astonished to find how little is expected of him there in the much that is asked of him. What Tolstoy asks of any one is that he shall keep trying to be like Christ; that he shall make this his ideal and perpetually endeavor to realize it in his conduct, though he shall and needs must fail to attain it. He asks this as Christ Himself asked His followers to be perfect even as their Father in heaven was perfect, knowing that more than the constant endeavor for that perfection was impossible. Tolstoy is otherwise apparently self-contradictory enough. In one place he supposes a devoted pair, who dedicate themselves to a life of good works, renouncing their worldly wealth and going down among the very poorest and foulest and basest, whom in the relentless logic of their self-sacrifice, they suffer to prey upon them and befoul them and infect them, till they end by being effectively in hell: hell here, though heaven hereafter. In another place he declares that he

"peacefully and joyously lives, and peacefully and joyously is approaching death" because he professes the Christianity which coincides with truth; yet so far as he may he is practising the precepts by which that devoted pair end in hell upon earth: the hell of futile endeavor for the good of others, which still he urges as the supreme object of the Christian life. That is, he urges it as the ideal, which must never be lost sight of though it may never be attained.

If you will read this saying in the light of his essay on "Life" it will not be hard, for there he shows the impossibility of the personal happiness which we are always longing for and striving for. Personal happiness is an unworthy end, which you fail of as you fail of personal righteousness, the worthiest end, the supreme ideal, the identification of the human with the divine. Yet this identification will be the destiny of the righteous man after death, when his human shall be merged in the divine; though what becomes of the unrighteous man we are not told. Perhaps it is felt that we are not concerned with the bad, the good being bad enough. Perhaps the way of the unrighteous man to such immortality is through his identification with all humanity first, and in his unity with the worst or the indifferent good, the righteous will prevail for the unrighteous. Tolstoy does not say that; he is chary of promising reward; but he says and he shows that the selfish life, the individual, the personal life, is always misery and despair, and, except for some moments of mad oblivion, is constant suffering. Some of the most beautiful, the most wonderful, passages of his fiction, both that which is real and that which is ideal in terms, embody events in which he seizes and perpetuates the heavenly rapture of a supreme act of self-sacrifice, of identification. The imagination has never gone farther than in these portrayals of mystical ecstasy; in them, indeed, the human consciousness of the original and final divine is suggested as no polemic could urge it.

Those who with Tourguénief regret that Tolstoy did not leave prophesying and resume imagining may say that here is proof of the greater power he could have had even for righteousness if he would have stayed to sugar his unpalatable truth with fiction. I do not think so, though I do not think that in fiction he has any peer or even any rival, because from the beginning he "took truth for his sole hero," and would have no other in any extremity,

or for any end. But even with his devotion to reality in the study of life, which, so far as I can note, was absolute, the prime affair was to captivate the reader, to lead his fancy, not to convince and persuade his reason. A great gulf, never to be bridged, divides the ethical and the æsthetical intention, though,—

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,”—

and though when the æsthetic intention presently becomes unconscious, and the creation of the truly beautiful may make for righteousness, still it is latent, still it serves two masters with the effect declared of old. But when once the call of Religion came to Tolstoy it came so powerfully, so loudly, that it must shut from his senses every voice that called before; there he stood; so help him God, he could no other than obey it, and it alone, testifying for it with all his heart and all his soul and all his mind. The moral spectacle is of unsurpassed sublimity, and no riches of fiction is conceivable, fiction even from him, the supreme master, which would console our poverty if we had failed of such books as “My Confession,” “My Religion,” “The Kingdom of God,” “What is Art?” “What is Religion?” “Life,” “What is to be Done?” and the many briefer essays, and occasional appeals to the world in signal events and emergencies against its blindness and cruelty and folly.

Suppose that he had never written these things, or such novels as “Resurrection” and “The Kreutzer Sonata” and “The Death of Ivan Ilyitch” where the purpose of captivating the imagination is renounced from the outset and a terrible story is nakedly told, with no ray of the prettiness or lure to curiosity in which the fictionist clothes his invention, and there is no appeal but to the agonizing conscience, would the world even of literature now be the better? I do not believe it. Before he came to his awakening Tolstoy had done enough for fiction and the art of it, for he had done incomparably more for it than any other master of it. He himself says that “War and Peace” is like Stendhal’s *Chartreuse de Parme* in some of its battle-pieces, and he would not say that if it were not his belief; but Stendhal was to Tolstoy, in the ripeness of his art, as a beginner, and of the effect of some anterior imitator. Above all, he lacked Tolstoy’s abounding and abiding moral sense, which is so one with that qualifying all human experience that in Tolstoy’s work it needs no explicit ap-

plication; it is interwoven there with the tissue of every motive and every action for the reader to feel and own.

Yet it is not enough. The prodigious fascination of the tale is such, its interest is so powerful, its current is so compelling, that the inner purpose and meaning are hidden from some at times, and perceptible only to a few at all times. The escape from the exercise of his power upon the fancy is vital to the wizard himself. If he would become and remain a human being, in obedience to the call that he heard above the applause of his admirers, and the sighs and sobs of the hearts he wrung, he must renounce his world of art, the world he had won and held subject to his spell, and seek only that other world in which he must be as the least of the brethren except in the power to bear and to transmit its heavenly light.

No doubt Tolstoy was qualified and fortified for his ethical work by his æsthetic achievement. But he descended to the labor of teaching from such heights of art in fiction as no man had reached before. From "War and Peace," from "Anna Karenina," he humbled his art to such 'prentice-work as those little fables and allegories and sketches adapted to the understanding of peasants and peasants' children, as he humbled his life to the level of theirs. But he could not keep his charm out of the least of his writings, and he could not remain within the bounds of the narrow duteousness that he had set himself. From time to time he rose out of his self-prescribed limit, and then the whole world had masterpieces from him again: such masterpieces as "The Death of Ivan Ilyitch," as "Master and Man," as "The Kreutzer Sonata," as "Resurrection." He could not put his gift away; his mastery mastered even him; his own power made him its instrument, so that if he had continued directly to exercise his art we might not have had greater effects from it. His will was overruled in the simplification of his literature as in the simplification of his life; he could not make himself one with the lowliest in either. The event was in his literature a compromise as it was in his life, when he sat in a ploughman's dress eating a ploughman's fare at one end of the table, and at the other the world, economic and æsthetic, sat served with costly viands. Midway, the succession of interviewing and reviewing witnesses criticised and censured his hospitality and acclaimed or condemned according to their respective make, while in the hours



saved from his rude toil he continued his sublime work. The event was a compromise or it was a defeat, if you choose to think it so; but it was no more a compromise or a defeat than that of any other human career. Compared with the event of any other career in this time, the career of the greatest warrior, statesman, king, priest or poet, it is a flawless triumph.

Tolstoy's example is of the quality of his precept, which with the will to be all positive is first notable for what is negative in it. To have renounced pride and luxury and idleness, and the vain indulgence of the tastes and passions, but not to have known want or the fear of it, not to have felt cold, hunger, houselessness, friendlessness, is to have done something which for the spectator lacks its corollary in practice, as the proposition of certain truths lacks its corollary in precept. That is, your reason is convinced and your soul is moved by what you are persuaded is right in the one as in the other, while as yet the necessary deduction from either does not enforce itself. Tolstoy says, in summing up the results of his gospel studies, that he "believes in Christ's teachings," and that "happiness on earth is possible only when all men fulfil Christ's teaching," which is "possible, easy and pleasant." "I understand now," he says, "that he alone is above others who humbles himself before others, and makes himself the servant of all. I understand now how those that are great in the sight of men are an abomination to God. . . . Everything that once seemed to me right and important—honor, glory, civilization, wealth, the complications and refinements of life, luxury, rich food, fine clothing, etiquette—has become for me wrong and despicable. Rusticity, obscurity, poverty, austerity, simplicity of surroundings, of food, of clothing, of manners, all have become right and important to me. . . . Now I can no longer give my support to anything that lifts me above, or separates me from, others. I cannot, as I once did, recognize in myself or others titles or ranks or qualities aside from the title or quality of man. . . . I cannot help striving for what will not separate me from others" in knowledge, fame and riches, "but will unite me to the majority of men. . . . I cannot encourage or take part in licentious pastimes, novels, plays, operas, balls and the like, which are so many snares for myself and for others. I cannot favor the celibacy of persons fitted for the marriage relation. . . . I cannot help considering as sacred and absolute the sole and unique

union by which a man is once for all indissolubly bound to the woman with whom he has been united," for this union he deems the sole marriage, whatever it is called. He cannot discriminate between his own country and others, or maintain his rights of property, or obey the authorities against his conscience, or take oaths, or resist evil with violence, or fail to work hard with his hands for his bread and for the subjection of his flesh and its lusts.

The catalogue of what he may not do, and does not believe, is longer than that of the things which he believes and may do; for as I have more than once noted, the variety of evil in this strangely constituted world of ours is far greater than the variety of good; the vices outnumber the virtues two to one. His precept, therefore, is mainly negative, as his practice is mainly negative, and the corollary of the good life is wanting as it is not wanting in the gospel creed, for there is implicated in this the promise of everlasting happiness, of personal, individual happiness such as we long for here all our hungry disappointed lives, but shall elsewhere have our fill of with rest to our souls.

In the Tolstoyan interpretation of the gospel religion this promise is not implicit. What we are to hope for is reunion with the divine source of our being; which may suffice the self-wearied worldling turned peasant, but which is not the simple hope of the peasant born, who has never yet had enough of himself in even those commonest things which constitute the bliss of conscious being, the every-day joys, the delight of beauty, the rapture of repose, even the low content of a full stomach.

"It cannot be that the instincts which are implanted in us and which are in themselves not more vicious than virtuous shall become and forever remain the means of our mortification and disappointment," the reader of Tolstoy says. He feels without impiety that he may not regard ultimate absorption into the source of being as the supreme end of being, and that in so far as he has lived rightly and cleanly he may justly hope for a future life of conscious blessedness. All the more simply and fully does he hope for this if his life on earth has involuntarily been that ideal life of toil, hardship, denial, which Tolstoy sought when he left the world. The reader, even if he is not of that level, but some level nearer the intellectual and social level of the prophet, feels like asking him whether he has not made a mistake in

his premise. He follows him consentingly enough in his "Confession," and he owns tacitly to many, or most, or all of Tolstoy's transgressions, according as he knows himself to have lived selfishly. But at the same time, unless he is of an exceptionally gloomy temperament he is aware of living in a world which at its worst is not hopelessly wicked or unhappy. In the midst of its immoralities he believes that he has known many who were true and kind and chaste, but who had yet no thought of abandoning it to its comforts and conventions and seeking salvation at the plough-tail. "Salvation," he would say, "is indeed there; but it is also here in the midst of the easy-going world in which some things seem almost innocuous even when not innocent." He would say that the moral universe was not governed by logic in its events; that consequences often failed to follow causes, and that there was a divine unreason in the Oversoul which was supreme in the affairs of men. He might say that grapes from thorns and figs from thistles were necessarily no more impossible in the divine economy than the entry of a rich man into the kingdom of heaven. He might say with Tolstoy himself that if it was a question of ideal perfection at which we were to aim, though we knew we could never attain it, then neither were we without this aim, and that far or near was the same if the intent was the same.

In all this I think that the reader would be measurably or entirely wrong; but whether they would be wrong who said they remained in and of the world in the hope and belief that man was to be redeemed socially and not individually, by rescuing Christianity from the church and state to which it was devoted by the first Christian emperor when he conquered in its sign, and by making it the economic and political life, I am not so sure. All this, however, is something aside from the literary inquiry which I proposed to myself in writing about Tolstoy. The excuse for such an excursion is that the literature, especially the critical literature of Tolstoy, is not separable from the religion of Tolstoy, in whom ethics and æsthetics are one. This is apparent in all that he has written, so far as I know it, and there is but little of his writing that I do not know, that I have not felt to the full depth of my being. His literature both in its ethics and æsthetics, or its union of them, was an experience for me somewhat comparable to the old-fashioned religious experience of people converted at

revivals. Things that were dark or dim before were shone upon by a light so clear and strong that I needed no longer grope my way to them. Being and doing had a new meaning and a new motive, and I should be an ingrate unworthy of the help I had if I did not own it, or if I made little of it. The voluntary and involuntary allegiance I had been paying to the truth which is beauty and beyond art, and to an ideal of goodness and loveliness in the commonest and cheapest lives, was here reasoned and exemplified in things beyond refutation or comparison. What I had instinctively known before, I now knew rationally. I need never again look for a theme of fiction; I saw life swarming with themes that filled my imagination and pressed into my hands. I had but to look about me, and there was my drama, comic or tragic, here, yonder and everywhere, with the meaning that could not fail my inquiry.

I first saw his book, "My Religion," in the house of two valued friends who spoke of it bewilderedly, as something very strange, which they could not quite make out. They were far too good to deny its strong appeal, but they were too spiritually humble, with all their reason for intellectual pride, to be quite sure of themselves in its seemingly new and bold postulates, which were, after all, really so old and meek. They showed me at the same time the closely printed volumes of the French version of "War and Peace," for it was long before its translation into English, and they were again apparently baffled, for a novel so vast in scale, and so simple and sincere in the handling of its thronging events and characters, was something almost as alien to modern experience as the absolute truthfulness of "My Religion." The incident was quite forgotten, and seven or eight years passed, in which I had for four or five years "The Cossacks" of Tolstoy on my shelves, unread and almost unlooked at. One day I took it down, wholly oblivious of the Russian author who had bewildered and baffled my friends, and dipped into it. To dip into it was to pass through its mystical depths, but I do not know that I yet received a definite impression of the greatness of a novelist who wrote so unlike other novelists, even other Russian novelists. By that time I had long known nearly all of Tourguénief, and something of his master Pushkin, but Tolstoy was a new name to me, and presently again it was a forgotten name. It was recalled to me by yet another friend, who lent me "Anna

Karenina" with the remark, "It is the old Seventh Commandment business, but it is not treated as the French treat it. You will be interested." The word was poor and pale for the effect of the book with me. The effect was as if I had never read a work of the imagination before. Now for the first time I was acquainted with the work of an imagination which had consecrated itself, as by fasting and prayer, to its creative office and vowed itself to none other service than the service of the truth. Here was nothing blinked or shirked or glossed, nothing hidden or flattered, in the deepest tragedy of civilized life. It was indeed the old Seventh Commandment business, not only not treated as the French treat it, but rightly placed as to the prime fact in its relation to all the other experiences of a sinning and agonizing soul. Nothing was disproportionately insisted upon; the story moved forward as with the steady pace of time, and the capital events in its progress were no more distinguished from the minor events by the author than the hours are distinguished from one another by the mechanism of a clock. It would be hard to say what was most searching in it; one scene, one incident, was as penetrating as another. If I name the moment when Anna defiantly, recklessly declares her love for Vronsky to her husband; or the moment when she steals into his house after she had abandoned it to wreak her mother soul in hopeless tenderness upon their child; or the moment of sleep when she escapes the agony of her guilt in the dream that she has two husbands and is crazily happy in it; or the moment in which she begins to be jealous of Vronsky and to suffer not only the ignominy of her social rejection, but the fear that he will leave her, and yet cannot help tormenting him out of sufferance; or that final moment when she lays herself down before the heavy train, and when its wheels crush over her breast would have saved herself from the death she sought; if I name these moments it is because they recur to me at random and not because I esteem them the effect of greater art than some others. I am not sure that the supreme effect of art in the book is not that moment when the dull, anti-pathetic Karenin perceives that he cannot forgive with dignity and yet forgives. Such a drama within the soul where the actor is the only spectator is something in its powerfulness beyond any overt action or experience.

It is now long since I read that story, and no doubt if I now

looked into it instance upon instance would start from its page to make me think my remembrance of the particulars of its greatness had served me ill. But I cannot be mistaken as to the greatness of its art as a whole; I recall no flaw in it, and its negative perfection is a truer witness of its art than anything positive could be. The happy story of the Levines in its parallel current with the dark stream of Anna's and Vronsky's tragical love is not to my sense the rift or seam in the perfection which some feel it. Rather it is an effect of the author's full sense of life, in which many diverse fates move parallel and inevitably contrast in the significance, the obviousness, which only a supreme artist can keep from seeming mechanical.

But I wish, in paying my eager homage to Tolstoy as an artist, not to appear only to treat of his art as technique. It is, so far as I know it, and I think I have left none of his fiction unread, always most spiritual; it is so far from seeking beauty, or adorning itself with style, as to be almost bare and plain. His art is from his conscience, and you feel his conscience in it at every moment. This was perhaps only implicit in his earlier work, but in his later work it becomes more and more explicit. He is never false to his reader because he is never false to himself; it would be foolish to suppose that he could not misrepresent or wrongly color a given motive or action in his tale, but you may trust your soul to him in the assurance that he will not.

Since I began to write these pages, I have read his critical study of De Maupassant, and though I cannot say that it has heightened my sense of his æsthetics, I cannot deny that it has clarified my knowledge. In this piece of criticism he tells us how, as he read the tales and novels of that great talent, who, he says, could consider of any piece of life so closely and long and deeply, as to see it in the "light that never was" before, he perceived a very great difference in the author's relations to his subjects and his characters. The subjects were, as we know, nearly always the old Seventh Commandment business, and the characters were the guilty lovers, the more guilty who overcame, and the less guilty who succumbed. In some cases, in some books, De Maupassant hated the evil in the seducers, and portrayed them with truth and conscience; in others he rather liked it and amused himself with their pleasures; in others he attempted to be Greek, as the Greek is supposed to have been, but probably

was not, to regard good and evil with a conscienceless indifference, and in the "creation of beauty" to be immoral, or as we vainly try to call it, unmoral. It is only when he was true to himself, to the sense of right and wrong which is innate in a man with his spiritual birth, that Maupassant is capable of that penetrating and absorbing attention which discovers the new meaning in things, and constitutes him to Tolstoy's mind a "genius."

Apparently from the very beginning of his fiction Tolstoy was capable of this penetrating and absorbing attention. From the beginning, therefore, he had but two questions to ask himself: Is this the fact? and, Have I represented the fact truly? If he had represented the fact truly, as in his conscience and intelligence he had known it really to be, he had treated it ethically and of necessity æsthetically; for as you cannot fail to feel in every piece of his fiction, the perfect æsthetics result from the perfect ethics. I cannot otherwise explain that greatness which I recognize in every page of his where he has not wilfully abdicated his artistry to do the work of the allegorist. Where the artist and the moralist work together for righteousness, there is the true art; for it is the business of the moralist to feel and the business of the artist to portray. Otherwise you have a sermon, or you have a romance, and not the homily in which your own soul is mirrored in that of some fellow man. When he had recognized and appropriated the principle that to see the fact clearly by the inner light, and to show it as he saw it, was his prime office, all other things were added unto Tolstoy. In the presence of his masterpiece, you forget to ask for beauty, for style, for color, for drama; they are there, so far as they are not of naughtiness, in such measure as no other novelist has compassed. Every other novelist, therefore, shrinks and dwindles beside him; behind him, in the same perception, but not the full perception or the constant perception, come Maupassant and Zola and Flaubert, Galdós and Pardo-Bazan, Verga, Björnson, and perhaps Hardy, —yes, certainly, Hardy in "Jude,"—with, of course, Hawthorne from a wholly different air.

I like to call the names of his stories for the pleasure of recalling the pleasure I have had in them; it was oftenest the pleasure-pain which the truth gives; but I cannot call them in the order of my reading or of their relative greatness. I remember as paramount, of course, "War and Peace," and "Anna Kare-

nina"; but only of less scope and not less truth, to my feeling and thinking, were "The Cossacks," "Kostia," "The Death of Ivan Ilyitch," "Two Generations," "Polikushkta," "Master and Man," "The Kreutzer Sonata," "Resurrection," "Scenes of the Siege of Sebastopol," "The Invaders," "The Russian Proprietor." Some of these are scarcely more than short stories, and there are other short stories, mere sketches, such as left the wide and deep impression of masterpieces, alike whether they were large masterpieces or little masterpieces. The equality of their art is wonderful, for it is always the same, through the æsthetics deriving from the ethics with the clear insight and the truthful utterance. For this, I have never, in my profoundest gratitude for it, thought that Tolstoy was to be praised any more than most other artists, his inferiors, were to be blamed for their mechanical obtuseness. The world is full of ugly things made for people who seem to want ugly things; and literature abounds in foolish and futile fiction because the vast majority of readers seem sure to want foolish and futile fiction. Perhaps their systems need it; they might revolt, in their mental infancy, from the food that nourishes the minds of grown men and women. But for art's sake, criticism should recognize the supreme value, the prime quality, of the art which comes purified and strengthened to its office through the devout scrutiny of life and the religious will to tell the truth of it.

If one were called upon to say in a word what Tolstoy and what his art was, one could not do better than to say that they were religious: the man, and the art that was the man. The art was more the man than the man knew. Out of the twelve volumes which represent his activity in the edition before me, nine are works of fiction, that is, works of art, and in the remaining three the artistic nature of the man is recurrently, if not constantly, shaping the religious utterances of his spirit. To enforce this point or that, he supposes a case so vividly that it lives at his touch; he invents a parable; he recalls an incident, an experience which he involuntarily clothes in drama, but so as to show its human reality the more and not to hide or to disqualify it. When he halts wilfully in this natural tendency and holds stubbornly to the business of laying down the law, or the gospel, he repeats himself again and again, both in theme and in phrase; he addresses himself to compelling rather than persuading his reader.



It is then that ceasing to take the natural, the spiritual view of the world and its waywardness, he takes the temperamental view, and in the gloom of his mood gropes for a hopeless reversion to innocence through individual renunciation of society instead of pressing forward to the social redemption which the very ecstasy of error must help effect. The state of mankind is bad, but it is not so bad as he sees it in this temperamental view, for then he sees it within and not without, and though the world is within each of us, it is always a little different in each one from the world in another. Essentially it is the same, its good and its evil are always the same; these divinely established constituents of our being no human difference can change; but from youth to manhood, from manhood to age, the world within changes, so that evil will be more at one time and less at another, or if not that, then more or less pardonable; and good will be more or less virtuous. As for the great world without, which is the sum of all the little worlds within, we judge it temperamentally and provisionally as we do these. We may be sure that, bad as it is, it is not hopelessly a mistake, and with all our mistaking we cannot make it so. It seems to me, though I say this with due submission, that it is not altogether or always the world that Tolstoy sees it in his polemics; it is not intolerably bad. For youth there is abundant joy in it, for manhood there is abundant reward of hard working and right doing, for age there is still comfort and the peace of a life well spent. There is not enough of these things, not nearly enough, to go round, so that much merit misses of them; and there is untold sin and selfishness and misery. But at one time the balance will be on one side and at another time on another; and often it will seem as if the effect were altogether subjective, and there were really nothing of what our senses reported to us.

It is impossible not to believe what Tolstoy in his primarily ethical works tells us is the fact; he shows it, he proves it; he traces the cause, he points the consequences; you cannot refuse your assent. Those books, "*My Confession*," "*My Religion*," "*Life*," "*What is to be Done?*" and the rest, if you have once read them, may have passed out of your surface memory, and they may have seemed as dead as the hundreds and thousands of other books which you have read; but open one of them and you find it all alive, glowing with the fire in which your irresponsibility

bility was consumed, and the light from which you hid yourself, but which again shines unquenched around you. Undeniably, however, the second effect of the ethical books is not as powerful as the first. They have changed you; never can you look on life as you looked on it before you read them; but it must be that in the nature of it the ethics which are not æstheticized are of less permanent impression than the æsthetics which are ethicized. Very likely few of my readers are such inveterate readers of "War and Peace" as I am, but there must be one or two among them who have read it half a score of times and who yet come to it with an unjaded sense of its beauty and truth. If such a one will take, say, "My Religion" and contrast its effect upon him with the effect of "War and Peace," I think he will own the more lasting power of the fiction. It is not only as a drama incomparably vaster than has filled the imagination before, but as a homily, comprehensive and penetrating beyond any direct sermoning, that it moves and stirs the heart. It is one of Tolstoy's earliest books, but already his ethics were realized if not formulated. He already hated the evil in his characters and loved the good, but with an artistic toleration which was also an ethical tolerance of the evil-doers. It appears fatalistic, but it does not, in its panoramic view of the vast trend of human affairs, ignore the personal responsibility of every actor in the spectacle, great or small: you are made to feel that there was a moment in the history of each when he or she, pressed but not forced by destiny, consciously lent himself or herself to the evil done in them. We behold a multitudinous movement of human beings, each of whom is a strongly defined character in himself and is a type of innumerable like characters. Every passion is portrayed, every affection, every propensity, not because the author wished to include all in his scheme, but because the scheme was so vast that they could not be excluded. It seems superfluous to say that it is a conspect of the Russian world (which in its human side is the world we always know everywhere) as it was affected by the wars of Napoleon's aggression; but no minute fact of any personal situation escapes the vigil of this prodigious study of life. If the proportions of the scheme are vast, the density of the constituent incidents, in which there are always free motive and purpose, is not less astonishing. It is as if the story were built upon the divination of atomic activity in the moral as in the material

universe where stocks and stones are the centres of motion as unceasing, unresting, as blind, as that of the stars in their courses, but not less guided and intended. Where from time to time the author pauses and tries to tell why the things happened that he makes us see happening, neither he nor we are the wiser for his exegesis. What we do seem to be the wiser for is a toleration for the actors, not the actions, of the drama commensurate with the scene of the drama.

This toleration is what stays us and consoles us for the sorrows and sins of people who seem so terribly like ourselves, but for whose evils we are much abler to forgive ourselves than we are for those evils which in his religious books Tolstoy brings home to our own doors. It was inevitable that he should finally do this; it was the logic of what he had already done. For him it was not enough that he should create fiction far beyond his preaching in its appeal; he must tell us what he was doing and leave us to determine what in view of the facts enforced we mean to do.

Probably we mean to do very little, however much we have determined. In the mean time he has given many of his readers a bad conscience, and a bad conscience is the best thing a man can have. It may be the best thing that the world can have. At any rate, it can never be the same world it was before Tolstoy lived in it. Worse it may be, in mere shame and despair, or better in mere shame, but not imaginably the same. Such men do not die for all time. To the end of time they have their recurring palingogenesis.

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